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OBSERVATIONS

On a B O O K, intituled,

AN INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE to
a larger Work, &c.

Containing an ANSWER

To the Author's PREJUDICES,
that Miraculous Powers were not con-
tinued to the Church after the Days of
the Apostles.

N. Christian Church



L O N D O N,

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OBSERVATIONS

On a BOOK, intituled,

AN INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE to
a larger Work, &c.

THE Author sets out with mentioning it as “an Opinion commonly received among
“ Christians, and above all among those of the
“ *Romish* Communion, that after the Days of
“ the Apostles, there resided still in the Primi-
“ tive Church, through several successive Ages,
“ a divine and extraordinary Power of working
“ Miracles, which was frequently and openly ex-
“ erted in Confirmation of the Gospel *.” The
Grounds of this Opinion, he thought it his Duty
to inquire into, and to shew “the genuine State
“ and Succession of Miracles, through all the
“ several Ages of the Christian Church, from
“ the Time of the Apostles, in order to discover
“ the precise Period and Duration of them, and
“ to settle some Rule of discerning the True
“ from the False, so as to be able to give a pro-
“ per Reason, for admitting the Miracles of one
“ Age and rejecting those of another †.”

* Page. 1.

† P. 6.

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This Inquiry, he tells us, he was “particularly excited to, by what he had occasionally observed and heard of the late Growth of Popery in this Kingdom,” which he ascribes to two Causes: *First*, the “Use which *Popish* Writers make of that Prejudice in favour of *Primitive Antiquity*, which prevails even in this Protestant Country, towards drawing weak People into their Cause, and shewing their Worship to be the best, because it is the most conformable to that ancient Pattern.” *Secondly*, (and above all) Their confident Attestation of Miracles as subsisting still in their Church, and the clear Succession of them, which they deduce through all History, from the Apostolic Times down to our own §.”

The Author gives himself an Air of some Importance, as qualified “to settle a Point which many learned Men among the Protestants have attempted, but with so little Success as to leave it at last as uncertain as they found it; none of them having been able to adjust the exact Limits between true and false Miracles, or to shew by any solid Reason, how long after the Days of the Apostles, the extraordinary Gifts of the holy Spirit continued in the Church, or in what Age they were actually withdrawn *.” And truly, if he could have settled the Point between those Writers, who, admitting on either Side that Miracles *did* continue in the Church *after* the Days of the Apostles, only differed about the precise Period *how long*, as, for Instance, whether till the third, fourth, or fifth, &c. Century; if, I say, he could have settled this Point, which by his Manner of introducing himself one would

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have supposed it was his Business to have settled; though I should not have thought him the most *usefully* employed, he might yet have given some Proof of his superior Sagacity. But instead of this, he fairly leaves both Parties in the Lurch, and maintains in *Opposition* to both, that there NEVER WERE ANY Miracles in the Church AFTER the Apostles; and this he says "is not only true, but USEFUL also, and even NECESSARY to the Defence of Christianity as it is generally received, and ought always to be defended in Protestant Churches *."

But for my own Part, I confess, I cannot see, that this Question hath any thing to do with the Defence either of Christianity at large against Infidels, or with Christianity, as it is generally received in Protestant Churches, against those of the *Romish* Communion. Not the *First*, because if Miracles after the Days of the Apostles were not *Necessary* for the Confirmation of the Gospel, certainly they could do no *Harm*. Not the *Second*; because supposing it admitted that Miracles did not cease with the Apostles, but were continued in the Church some Time after; it may yet be true (and Protestant Writers have shewn it to be true) that *Popery* can gain no Advantage by such Concession. And therefore, when we see this Writer thus *needlessly* adventuring upon a bold Assertion, and setting all Christian Writers, both ancient and modern, at absolute Defiance; it gives but too much Cause for Suspicion that something else lay at Bottom, to excite him to this Undertaking, besides the *Growth of Popery in this Kingdom*. The Author says, that we have no sufficient Reason to

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believe *upon the Authority* of the Primitive Fathers, that Miracles were continued to the Church after the Days of the Apostles. His Meaning is not to say, that the Primitive Fathers have not delivered it as *Fact*, that Miracles *were* wrought after the Days of the Apostles, but to deny their *Authority*; for he tells us expressly, that “ the Claim of a miraculous Power [still subsisting in the Church] was universally asserted and “ believed in all Christian Countries, and in all “ Ages of the Church, till the Time of the Re- “ formation §.” His Quarrel, therefore, is with the whole Stream of Christian Writers, from the Days of the Apostles till the Time of the Reformation; whom, without any kind of Distinction, he represents as Witnesses unfit to be depended upon in *any* of the Reports they have given of Miracles wrought in their own Times.

A *candid* Man would not have offered such a Charge as this to the Publick, without producing his Evidence at the same Time. But for *this* we are to trust to some “ LARGER WORK, in which “ he will endeavour to evince, by *particular Facts* “ and *Testimonies*, what the *general View* of the “ Question given [in this *Introductory Dis-* “ *course*] and the *Reflections* naturally arising “ from it, previously dispose us to *suspect*, that “ the pretended Miracles of the Primitive Church “ were all mere Fictions *.” It is this *general View* of the Question, and the *Reflections* which the Author has made upon it that I would now examine; to remove some *Prejudices* which otherwise may, with many, *predetermine* the Cause before it comes to a fair Hearing.

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He begins his Attack upon the *third, fourth, and fifth* Centuries, upon which he observes, that in them “ the chief Corruptions of *Popery* were
 “ either actually introduced, or the Seeds of them
 “ so effectually sown, that they could not fail of
 “ producing the Fruits which we now see. By
 “ these Corruptions (he tells us) he means, *the*
 “ *Institution of Monkeny, the Worship of Re-*
 “ *liques, Invocation of Saints, Prayers for the*
 “ *Dead, the superstitious Use of Images, of the*
 “ *Sacraments, of the Sign of the Cross, and of*
 “ *consecrated Oil*; by the Efficacy of all which
 “ Rites, and as a Proof of their divine Origin,
 “ perpetual Miracles are affirmed to have been
 “ wrought in these very Centuries.” See p.
 12—21. I am not satisfied, I confess, by the
 Authorities produced, that this Account of the
 fourth Century is quite fair. Protestant Writers
 do not admit that *WORSHIPING Reliques, or*
Images, or Saints, were Practices known so early.
 But as this is not material to my Purpose at pre-
 sent, I shall not contest it, but *suppose*, with the
 Author, that all the Usages mentioned prevailed
 in the fourth Century. What are we to con-
 clude from this? Take the Consequence as he has
 drawn it himself; “ If we admit the Miracles, we
 “ must necessarily admit the Rites for the Sake
 “ of which they were wrought *.” In Support
 of this Conclusion, he cites the Authority of one
 whom he calls “ one of the ablest Writers of the
 “ Church of *Rome*,” *Knot the Jesuite*, who pre-
 tends, that “ the Doctrines of *Popery*, having all
 “ the Arguments of Credibility (even Miracles
 “ not excepted) whereby the Apostles and our
 “ blessed Saviour himself confirmed their Do-

* P. 22:

“ Strines,

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“*Et* rines, they may therefore challenge to be accepted and acknowledged as divine Truths.” And upon this the Author remarks : “ Thus far we must own the *Jesuite* argues rightly, that if we receive those Arguments of Credibility [*i. e.* Miracles] we must receive those Doctrines which accompany them as so many divine Verities, revealed and attested by Almighty God. So that if the Authority of a *Chrysostom*, or a *Jerom*, or an *Austin* can oblige us to believe the Miracles of the fourth Century, they must oblige us also to espouse the Rites which those Miracles confirmed, and those Fathers practised *.”

I am not disposed to dispute the Author’s general Point, that if we admit the Miracle, we must accept the Doctrine in Confirmation of which the Miracle is wrought ; which is not true without Distinction. But the Thing to be attended to at present is, whether it be always necessary to consider the Miracles wrought in any Age, as *Confirmations* of the *concurrent Usages* or *Practices* of that Age. I say it is *not* always necessary, nor is it *ever* proper or reasonable so to consider them, unless there be some *Circumstance* in the Miracle which *specifies* the *Intention* of the Worker, and shews that it is *meant* to authorize such Usage. Let us attend to this Case as it stood in respect of *Christ* and his Apostles. They came in the Name of God to be the Publishers of a new Doctrine to Mankind, and *pleaded* the Miracles which they wrought as the Evidence of their Mission. This Plea *pointed out* the Use and Purpose of those Miracles ; and if you can produce me a Monk, or any other Person, who *pretended* to a

* P. 23.

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divine Mission, and bore in hand that such an Usage or Practice (not warranted by Scripture) either till then not heard of, or received only upon the Authority of Custom, was to be received as of divine Appointment, and wrought a Miracle or Miracles in Confirmation of his Pretensions, I will allow the Cases to be parallel, and our Author will then have some better Pretence to say, "Either accept the Doctrine or reject the "Miracle". But if the Case should be that some Writer has told us, that Miracles were wrought, "not by the Ministry of any living and holy "Men, but, by the *Reliques* of the *Dead*, or the "Oyl of their *Lamps* or the *Sign* of the *Cross*" (of which kind the Author tells us are "all the "Miracles attested by *Chrysostom*", *) I think that in this Case we may admit the Miracles (if there is proper Evidence to support them) without being obliged to admit as *divine Verities* the *Invocation* of *Saints*, the *Adoration* of *Reliques* or *Images*, or any other superstitious Custom which then prevailed; because there does not

* P. 28. And of this sort are all the Miracles reported by *St. Austin. Civ. Dei*, Lib. xxii. Cap. 8, which were wrought, not by the Ministry of living Men extraordinarily appointed, as in the Apostles Times, but, (to use his own Words) "five "per Sacramenta Christi, five per orationes, vel Memorias "Sanctorum ejus:" i. e. either by the Sacraments, or by Prayer or by the Memories of the Saints. With this Account his Catalogue well agrees; and if the Author would have understood those Passages in these Fathers (of which there are many) in which they confess, that the Miraculous Gifts were then actually withdrawn, because the Church stood no longer in need of them, as they ought to be understood, with this Distinction; he would have spared his unmannerly Reflection, that they confessed this, when they were disposed to SPEAK TRUTH p. 36. It might be true that Miracles were then wrought by the Sacraments, &c. tho' it was not true that any were then wrought by the Ministry of living Men as in the Apostles Days.

B

appear

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appear to be any *necessary Connection* between the *Work*, and the *Worker's Approbation* of such Practices. If God thinks fit to work a Cure by dead Men's Bones, it will not follow that dead Men, or their Bones ought to be worshiped, or that God approves such Worship, in those who receive the Cure. For God may reward the *Piety* of the Person who applies to him in *Faith* and *Trust*, without being understood, as approving the *Superstition*. The Author tells us indeed that "whenever any *Sacred Rite* or *Religious Institution* becomes the *Instrument* of real Miracles, we ought to consider, that Rite as confirmed by divine Approbation *." But for what Reason does he say this? He offers none. It may as plausibly be said, that if God makes any Man the *Instrument* of real Miracles, we ought to consider *that Man* as approved of God. And yet it is certain, if Scripture is to be believed, that *bad Men* have been made Instruments in the Hand of God, for very extraordinary Purposes.

But to what Purpose then, you will ask, may such Miracles be supposed to have served, if *not* to the *Confirmation* of the *particular* Customs and Doctrines of the Age in which they were wrought? To this Question let the Author himself answer, who gives it as the *common Opinion* of Christians, that they were wrought in Confirmation of THE GOSPEL, and that it was reckoned "a subsidiary Proof of the Divinity of the CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE §;" that is, as the Truth is, not of the *peculiar Doctrines*, which prevailed in the Ages in which they were wrought (as he afterwards represents it) but, of the COMMON FAITH, once delivered to the Saints: And to confirm this by

* P. 23.

§ P. 1.

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an Authority, which, with our *Protestant* Author, ought to have had more weight than Father *Knot's*, I will subjoin the Determination of one of the * ablest Writers of his Time, who had well considered the Case, and replies to the very Argument in the following words.

“ The Miracles said to be done in those Times
 “ [meaning the fourth Century] are urged by the
 “ *Romanists* as an invincible Argument of God's
 “ *approving* the Honour that was given to the
 “ Saints and their Reliques in that Age of the
 “ Church. But I wish they would attend to
 “ what *St. Augustine* says, who after a pretty
 “ large Account of Miracles, that were wrought
 “ in his Time, and some too at the Memories of
 “ Martyrs, plainly says, that whether they were
 “ wrought by the Ministry of Martyrs or Angels
 “ (for *that* he knew not) they were wrought to
 “ give Testimony to THAT FAITH *for which the*
 “ *Martyrs died*”—The learned Author goes on
 and says—“ There is no Reason to suppose, that
 “ *every Circumstance* of the Devotion of Chri-
 “ stians that received miraculous Relief, must
 “ be *attested* by those Miracles which God
 “ wrought in Confirmation of the Truth of
 “ Christianity. God has made Use even of wick-
 “ ed Men for the working of Miracles; and I
 “ cannot understand, why a Miracle may not be
 “ wrought in Behalf of a *sincere* Man, without
 “ approving his *Weakness*, any more than the
 “ others *Wickedness* is approved by God's making
 “ Use of him to testify the Truth”. This rea-
 soning is farther urged upon the Mention of a
 Story told by *Jerom*, that *Hesychius* a holy Man
 ventured his Life to steal the Body of *Hilarion*
 the Monk out of the Garden of *Cyprus*, where

* Dr. Claget, once Preacher of *Grays Inn*.

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he was buried, to carry it to *Palestine*; and that *Constantia* took the Loss of the Body so to heart that she died upon it. He says farther, that even in his Time there were great Miracles done in both Places; which raised a Contention between those of *Palestine* and those of *Cyprus*, one pretending to his *Body*, the other to his *Spirit*. For the Truth of this Story the learned Author does not pretend to vouch (as without doubt all Stories of this kind are not to be received indifferently) but to the Purpose of our present Argument he makes this Remark upon it. “ If
 “ Miracles were done in both Places, I am pretty
 “ well satisfied that God did not thereby intend
 “ to demonstrate either the Clearness of *Hefychius*,
 “ or the Discretion of *Constantia* in this Business,
 “ nor approve the violent Passion of either of them
 “ for Reliques. I do not deny but they might
 “ both of them be holy Persons, but it was not
 “ for such Things as these; and if this Part of
 “ their Story had been omitted, their Reputation for Sanctity had lost nothing by it. What
 “ was it therefore that God testified by these Miracles? I answer, with all Submission, that
 “ he testified the Truth of THAT RELIGION in
 “ which Hilarion died; of that Religion for
 “ which the Martyrs died; the most holy Religion which was first taught by *Jesus*, then by
 “ the Apostles, then by the Primitive Ages of
 “ Christianity after the Apostles; NOT of any
 “ Sentiments or Practices, which neither the holy
 “ *Jesus* taught nor his Apostles, and which the
 “ Primitive Church was a Stranger to—And if
 “ I should say that they who can be content with
 “ the old Religion, may, and ought to be content with the old Miracles, I should say no
 “ other Thing than what I could justify—But if
 God

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“ God is pleased to add *new Miracles* out of his
 “ abundant Goodness ; I do not doubt but such
 “ Miracles are a Confirmation of the *old Religion*,
 “ as *St. Austin* tells us those were, which God
 “ wrought at the *Memories* of the Martyrs. But
 “ those Miracles did by no Means *canonize* the
 “ *Weakness* of any holy Person, in the Matter of
 “ *Martyrs*, or *Saints*, or *Reliques*, nor the In-
 “ *discretion* of *Hesychius* or *Constantia*, nor did
 “ they give any Authority at all to such Exam-
 “ ples.” See the Collection of Tracts written in
 the *Popish* Controversy, and lately published in
 Folio. Vol. II. Tit. vi. p. 202, 203, 204.

Thus this Writer, and if the Reader thinks
 there is Sense in what he says, he will perceive
 that the Author's Charge upon the fourth Cen-
 tury stands intirely without Support. And yet
 I will go so far as to say, that as that Sort of
 Miracles, where some superstitious Rite or Custom
 hath the Relation of an *Instrument*, naturally
 stand *suspected*, so they will *generally* be found
 ill supported ; and I believe, with the learned
 Author above cited, that “ the Noise of Mi-
 “ racles that was so loud in this and the next
 “ Age, is in a great Part to be imputed to the
 “ *Credulity* of the Age.” But this will not con-
 tent *our* Author, who says, that “ the pretended
 “ Miracles of the fourth Contury were not only
 “ *in general*, and for *the greatest Part*, but in-
 “ *tirely* and *universally*, the Effects of FRAUD
 “ and IMPOSTURE ;” meaning in the BISHOPS,
 and CLERGY, whom he charges but a few Lines
 after, with *tampering with false Miracles*, with
 LIES and FORGERIES *. Surely this is an un-
 reasonable Stretch ! For if, as he gives us to

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understand, these Miracles were extraordinary Effects, supposed to be wrought, by *the Reliques* of the *Dead*, and the *Oil* of their *Lamps*, and the *Sign* of the *Cross*, and the like; why is it not as easy to ascribe the Credit of such Miracles to mere *Superstition* and *Credulity*, as to *Fraud* and *Imposture*? Is every Man a *Knave* or a *Cheat*, who believes that there is Vertue in a *Charm* or an *Amulet*? What has he said to shew, that the *Bishops* and *Clergy* had any particular Concern in these thing but this, that they have left it recorded in their Writings, that such Miracles were wrought? And how does he know that they did not believe it?

But let it be supposed, if you please, that no Credit is due to any of the Miracles of the fourth Century, what are we to do with the Ages *preceeding*? Why here the Author alters his Argument, and not finding, I suppose, *such* Corruptions in those Ages as would be sufficient to destroy the Credit of the Miracles reported to have been wrought in those Ages, he makes Use of the Corruptions of the fourth Century, and its Forgeries, to destroy the Credit of the Miracles reported to have been wrought in every other Age both *after* and *before* it, up to the very Times of the Apostles. As to his Observations upon the Ages *below* the fourth Century, I have nothing to say to them; because a Presumption *will* lye, that if the Miracles of the fourth Century were Forgeries, the Miracles of the Ages *succeeding* might probably be so too, the same Corruptions continuing and every Day encreasing; which *Presumption*, however, must give way to *plain Evidence* on the other Side, if such Evidence *should* be found in later Ages. But it is hard

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to conceive how a Presumption *can* lye, that if the Miracles of the *fourth* Century were Forgeries, the Miracles of the *third* and *second* were so. Let us see how the Author attempts it.

“ *First*; when we reflect on that *surprizing*
 “ *Confidence and Security*, with which the prin-
 “ cipal Fathers of this fourth Age have affirmed
 “ as true what they themselves had either forged,
 “ or what they knew at least to be forged, it is
 “ natural to suspect, that so bold a Defiance of
 “ of sacred Truth could not be acquired, or be-
 “ come general at once, but must have been
 “ carried gradually to that Height by Custom
 “ and the Example of former Times, and a
 “ long Experience of what the Credulity and
 “ Superstition of the Multitude, would bear *.”

It is surprizing that this Writer should lay a peremptory Charge against the Fathers of the fourth Century, in order to support a like Charge against the Fathers of the Third and the Second, which it is plain he does not think fit to trust to himself! He says here, that “ the principal Fathers
 “ of the fourth Age, have affirmed as true what
 “ they themselves had either *forged*, or what they
 “ *knew* at least to be forged.” So he said once before; — “ the pretended Miracles of the fourth
 “ Century, were *entirely* and *universally* the Ef-
 “ fects of *Fraud* and *Imposture* §.” So he says again afterwards—they are MERE FORGERIES† And yet at another Time (when he is in a better Mood) he says of these very same *principal Fathers*, that they might “ have been *deluded* so far
 “ by other People’s Forgeries as to take them
 “ for real Miracles ‡.” What does all this shew less than that the Author talks at random, and

* P. 56. § P. 29. † P. 31. ‡ P. 37.

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not as the Truth of History directs? He may think it the same Thing perhaps as to his Argument, whether you suppose the Fathers to have been *Cheats* or whether you suppose them to have been *Credulous*; and so it is as to his grand Conclusion, that no Miracles were wrought after the Apostles Times. But it is not so as to the *Characters* of the *Men*; it is not so as to the *particular* Argument now under Consideration, which bears with all its *Force*, upon the Supposition, that the Fathers of the fourth Century reported Miracles in a *bold Defiance of Truth*, affirming as *true*, either what they had *forged* themselves, or what they *knew* to be forged; which he thinks they would not have done unless they had been gradually led to it by Custom, and the Example of former Times, and a long Experience of what the Credulity and Superstition of the Multitude would bear. An honest Man has no Occasion to consider what the Credulity and Superstition of the Multitude will or will *not* bear; but *Knaves* have. It is to be supposed then that these Fathers *were* Knaves, or the Argument cannot stand. But should it not have been *proved*, as well as *supposed*, that these Fathers reported false Miracles, not out of *Credulity*, but downright *Knavery*; not as *believing* them to be *true*, but as *knowing* them to be *forged*? Perhaps he expects we should wait for the Proof till his *large* Work comes out. With all my Heart: But then in the mean time he must give up his *previous Argument* as a mere Impertinence. The *previous Argument*, I suppose, is offered, *in aid* of the *principal Evidence*, or I know not what he means by it. It ought therefore to have some footing of *its own* to stand upon; which it cannot have,

if it takes *pro concessio*, the very Thing which the *principal Evidence* is to prove.

But there is something so curious in this Argument, that it deserves to be pursued a little farther. It proceeds thus. The Fathers of the fourth Century, with surprizing Confidence, report Miracles as done in their Time which were Impostures. But it is not natural to think, that they would have had this Assurance, if they had not had the Examples of former Times to convince them how much the Credulity and Superstition of the Multitude would bear. Therefore the Miracles reported to have been done in those former Times, must be Impostures likewise. If the Argument proves any thing it is this ; that false Miracles never could have had a *Beginning* in *any* Age ; for to say that they had a *Beginning*, supposes a Period antecedently to which they were *not* ; which yet is impossible to be supposed, if there is no Reason in supposing that an Impostor should give out Reports of such Miracles, unless he has had the Example of former Times, to shew him how much the Credulity and Superstition of the Multitude will bear. But, pray, let me ask this Reasoner ; Suppose it can be shewn (as it is very easy to be shewn) that the Fathers of the second and third Centuries have reported (as *he* will say, *false*) Miracles as done in their Times, with the *same* Confidence, that the Fathers of the fourth Century have reported them as done in theirs ; will it not follow by *his* Logic, that in like manner as the fourth Century was prepared to receive the Impostures of that Age, by the Impostures of the second and third, so the second and third Centuries were also prepared to admit the Impostures

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of those Ages by the Impostures of the First ? If the Author can see any Distinction in the two Cases, I desire him to shew what it is. If there is none, he has but *one* Choice in the Conclusion. He must renounce his Argument, or he must reject the Gospel, which, after having stood the Test of so many Ages, I trust is not to be shaken by *better* Arguments than this.

The Author goes on, and says : “ If we compare the principal Fathers of the fourth with those of the earlier Ages, we shall observe the same Characters of Zeal and Piety in them all; but more Learning, more Judgment, and less Credulity in the later Fathers. If these then be found, either to have forged Miracles, &c. —it will naturally excite in us the same Suspicion of their Predecessors; who in the same Cause, and with the same Zeal, were less learned, and more credulous, and in greater need of such Arts, for their Defence and Security*.” I cannot easily understand how *Piety*, and a *bold Defiance of sacred Truth* can stand together in the same Character; nor can I see sufficient Ground to say, that the Fathers of the second and third Centuries were *more credulous* than the Fathers of the fourth. But this I see, that those who are thus persuaded, may as easily fancy that the Fathers of the first Century, were more credulous than *all* of them; and the Inferences which may be drawn from thence in derogation of the Authority of the Miracles, reported to have been wrought by *Christ* and his Apostles, are very obvious. But above all Things, I am surprized at the Author’s Pretension, that the Fathers of the earlier Ages *had greater need*

* P. 37.

of the Arts of false Miracles *for their Defence and Security*, than the later Fathers had. They had, if you please, greater need of *true* Miracles to support the *Credit* of the *Gospel*; which circumstance may be admitted as *strengthening* the Credibility of any proper Evidence, which appears in the Records of those Times, to prove that Miracles really were wrought. But it can afford no sort of Presumption, that the Christians of those Times *forged* Miracles. What should they forge them for? why, to make Profelytes to that Faith which exposed them to all their Sufferings. Is this what the Author calls using *Arts, for their Defence and Security*? Common Sense would rather lead us to argue thus; that as the Christians in these Ages, gave (or were ready to give) the same Evidence of their steady Adherence to the Truth that *Christ* and his Apostles gave, though the Miracles reported to have been wrought in those Times, may not be of *equal* Authority with those wrought by *Christ* and his Apostles, because in *other Respects* they stand upon Proofs of an inferior Nature; yet surely it ought to secure such Reporters from the Charge of *Fraud* and *Imposture*, for which indeed there does not appear to be any Foundation *in Fact* in the History of those (or even * *later*) Times.

* It is remarkable what St. *Austin* says of the Miracles recorded by himself, *viz.* that “wherever they were wrought
“they were known but by a few, and that when they were
“told to others by those who were Witnesses of them, they
“did not come with that *Authority* as to be believed without
“Doubt or Difficulty.” *Hæc, ubicunque fiunt, ibi sciuntur,*
vix a tota ipsa Civitate — nam plerumque etiam ibi paucissimi
sciunt — et quando alibi aliisque narrantur, non tanta ea com-
 mendat autoritas, ut sine difficultate vel dubitatione credantur.

If

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His last Argument is, that “ as the personal
 “ Characters of the earlier Fathers gave them no
 “ Advantage over their Successors : So neither
 “ does the Character of the earlier Ages afford
 “ any real Cause of Preference, as to the Point
 “ of their Integrity, above the later—For there
 “ never was any Period of Time in all Ecclesia-
 “ stical History, in which so many rank Heresies
 “ were publickly professed, nor in which so many
 “ spurious Books were forged and published by
 “ the Christians under the Names of *Christ* and the
 “ Apostles, and the Apostolic Writers, as in those
 “ Primitive Ages ; several of which forged Books
 “ are frequently cited and applied to the Defence
 “ of Christianity, by the most eminent Fathers of
 “ the same Ages, as true and genuine Pieces, and
 “ of equal Authority with the Scriptures them-
 “ selves. And no Man surely can doubt but
 “ that those who would rather forge or make use
 “ of forged Books, would in the same Cause,
 “ and for the same Ends, make use of forged
 “ Miracles †.” The Author here says, that *the*
most eminent Fathers of the first Ages cited *forged*
Books, as *true* and *genuine* Pieces, and of *equal*
Authority with the Scriptures themselves. And
 a little after he says, that “ many *spurious* Books
 “ were *forged* in the earliest times of the Church,
 “ in the Names of *Christ* and his Apostles, which
 “ passed upon *all* the Fathers as *Genuine* and *Di-*
 “ *vine* through several successive Ages §.” I
 think the Gentleman is mistaken. I know of

If this does not commend St. *Austin's* Judgment in believing
 all the Miracles he has reported, it bespeaks him to have been
sincere and *honest*. IMPOSTORS are not wont to talk in this
open manner.

† P. 38.

§ P. 41.

some

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some *canonical* Books which, for some time, were not *universally* accepted as genuine; and there may have been others, admitted by *some* as genuine, but *generally* rejected as spurious. But I know of no Book *not* canonical, which *passed upon ALL the Fathers as genuine and divine*, THROUGH SEVERAL SUCCESSIVE AGES. Nor does it follow, that because some of the Fathers *cited* spurious Pieces, therefore they were held in the *same rank* with the Scriptures themselves—But what is all this to the Purpose? Really I do not see. *Heresies* were publickly professed. But who were the *Heresiarchs*? Not the Fathers. *Spurious* Books were *forged* and *published*. Who were the *Forgers* and *Publishers*? Not the Fathers. But the Fathers *received* these Forgeries as true and genuine Pieces; and it is asked, *might* they not be as easily imposed upon by false *Miracles* as by false *Books*? Who doubts it? And be it granted, for Argument's sake, that as they admitted some Books as genuine, which, upon stricter Search, were found to be spurious; so they also admitted some Miracles, which were not sufficiently well attested. How will this help to support his general Conclusion, that no Miracles were wrought in those Ages? Does the Author pretend that ALL the Books received in the Christian Church in those Ages were spurious? No; he tells us that “the Apostolic Writings were of *high Authority*,” and says that “as the Zeal with which they were fought for by all Churches, was the Motive which excited some of the ablest and most learned of the Christians, to take the Pains of forging and vending such Books under those false Titles; so the great *Fame and Success* of the Apostolic *Miracles*, would

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“ would naturally excite some also of the most
 “ crafty, when the Apostles themselves were
 “ dead, to attempt some *juggling Tricks* in *Imita-*
 “ *tion* of them *.” What does the Author
 know of the *Abilities, Learning, or Religion* of
 these *Forgers of Books*? He calls them *Christians*;
 and they might pass under that *Name* as the an-
 cient *Hereticks* did; to whom, most probably, the
 Church was indebted for these Forgeries. But
 the Question I would ask is this: Why, if (the
 Corruptions of the Age notwithstanding) among
 these *forged Books* there were some *genuine Pieces*,
 is it not as natural to suppose, that among these
juggling Tricks, (as he calls them) there might
 have been some *real Miracles*? It is farther
 worth remarking, that this Passage absolutely
 destroys his Argument, by which he endeavours
 to disgrace the Miracles of the earlier Ages, from
 the supposed Forgeries of the fourth Century. We
 have *above* been told, that the Forgeries of the
 fourth Century could never have had a Being, if the
 World had not been prepared for them by the
 Forgeries of the preceding Ages. But *now*, it
 seems, he has found out, that an Age of *Im-*
postures, may arise *immediately* out of an Age of
true Miracles, by way of *Imitation*. There is
Sense in this Way of accounting for the Rise of
Impostures; and, I believe, that if there had
 never been any *true Miracles*, we should not have
 heard of *false* ones. But if this way of reasoning
 be admitted, his Argument is gone: For it is
 just as natural to suppose, that the Fame and Suc-
 cess of *true Miracles* in the *third* Century, might
 give rise to the *Impostures* of the *fourth*; as that

* P. 42.

the Fame and Success of *true* Miracles in the *first* Century gave rise to the *Impostures* of the *second*.

I beg the Author's Pardon, if I mistake him, in supposing, that he admits the Apostolic Writings, as *Genuine*, and the History of the Miracles which they contain to be *true*. The Passage does not *say* whether the *Fame* and *Success* of the one, and the *high Authority* of the other, were owing to the force of *Truth*, or the Frauds of *Impostors*; and there is something that looks odd, when he says (and brings *Heathen* Writers to vouch) that *Simplicity* and *Credulity* were the *distinguishing Characters* of the *first Ages*, and represents those *artful Pretenders*, who (as he says) *insinuated themselves into private Houses* to play their *jugling Tricks*, as having *been able to maintain their Ground*, THROUGH THE THREE *first Centuries*. I think this is reckoning the *first* Century among the *Ages of Imposture* as well as the *second* and the *third*; and perhaps some Persons will not find it very easy to comprehend, that if the World was so *very credulous immediately* after the Death of the Apostles, it should have been a *great deal* less so in the Apostolic Times themselves—But that which determined me to the Sense I have taken, is, what he plainly and explicitly says in the next Page, *viz.* that * “The
“ Miracles of *Christ* and his Apostles carry the
“ clearest Marks of *Sincerity*, being wrought
“ for an End highly worthy of the Interposi-
“ tion of the Deity, and by the Ministry of
“ mean and simple Men, in the open View of
“ the People,—and delivered to us by Eye Wit-
“ nesses whose *honest Characters* exclude the *Sus-*
“ picion of Fraud, and whose *Knowledge* of the
“ Facts which they relate, scarce admit of the

* P. 43.

“ *Proba-*

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“*Probability of a Mistake.*” I shall (till the contrary appears) accept this frank Declaration in favour of Christianity, as Proof, that in this Push against the Fathers, he does not mean to impeach *Christ* and his Apostles; though I confess, I should have done it with more Satisfaction, if he had shewn, that as his *Charge* stops with the Fathers, his *Arguments* stop there too.

Upon the whole, I hope it appears, that this Introductory Discourse, advances NOTHING in support of the Author’s general Conclusion, that there were no Miracles in the Church after the Days of the Apostles, but leaves the Question just as it found it. There is but one way of satisfying the Publick upon this Point, and that is, to produce the *particular Instances* of Miracles reported by the ancient Fathers, as wrought in their Times, and shewing, that they are not supported by *credible Evidence*. This (as I understand) is to be the Purpose of his *Larger Work*; and if he can effectually detect the *Frauds* and *Forgeries* of those Writers, or by any Instances of *Fact*, discredit their Testimonies, he has a Right to publish his Discoveries. But to scatter weak Surmises, and raise *Prejudices* before the Evidence is heard, is not *very* fair, and hath more the Appearance of an *Experiment* to try (as he says) *what the Publick will bear*, than of Confidence in the *Justice* of the Cause he has undertaken.

But since he has thought fit to offer his *Suspicions* on *one* Side of the Question, I may have Liberty, I hope, to offer *one Presumption* on the *other*, which I take to be a great deal better founded. It is what our Saviour said to his Apostles, when he gave them Commission to *go into*
all

OBSERVATIONS. 25

all the World and preach the Gospel to every Creature.— And these Signs shall follow them that believe; in my Name shall they cast out Devils; they shall speak with new Tongues; they shall take up Serpents; and if they drink any deadly Thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay Hands on the Sick, and they shall recover. Mark. xvi. 17.

It will be observed, that this Promise was not made to the Apostles *personally*, but to them that *should believe* through their preaching, without any *limitation* of the Time for the Continuance of these Powers to *their Days*. And when it is considered, how great a Part of the *Heathen World* remained unconverted *after* their Days, it is no unreasonable Supposition, that these Powers did not expire with the Apostles, but were continued to their Successors in the Work of propagating the Gospel. *How long* I say not, and perhaps there is not Light enough left in History to settle this Point; as indeed it nothing concerns us. But the *earliest* Fathers unanimously affirm, that these Powers subsisted in the Church in *their* Times, and *why* they are not to be *believed*, it is the Author's Business to shew. The Fathers, at present, are in *Possession*, and they have a Right to keep it till their Title is disproved.

I have but one Word more to offer at present, and that shall relate to the Connection there is between this Question, and the Controversy between Protestants and the Church of *Rome*. The Author (as we have seen) set out with telling us, that the giving up all the Miracles except those of the Scriptures, is not only *useful* but even *necessary* to the Defence of Christianity, as it ought always to be defended in Protestant
D Churches;

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Churches ; and he tells us towards the close of his Book, that “ by granting but a single Age
 “ of Miracles, after the Times of the Apostles,
 “ we shall be entangled in a Series of Diffi-
 “ culties, whence we can never fairly extricate
 “ ourselves, till we allow the same Powers also
 “ to the present Age.” What are these *Diffi-*
culties the Gentleman is afraid of ? I see none.
 Surely ! we may be justified in admitting, that
 Miracles were wrought in the second or third
 Century, without being obliged to receive the
Popish Legends ; for I cannot by any Means be of
 the Author’s Opinion that if the Miracles of
one Age be true or false, the Miracles of *another*
 Age (either upwards or downward) must there-
 fore be so too. I think that every Age must
 stand upon *its own* Basis, and when our Author
 has proved that the Writers (we will say) of the
 sixth, seventh, and following Centuries, deserve
 as much credit as the Writers of the second or
 third, it will be time enough to take this Matter
 into farther Consideration. In the mean while,
 there is one Thing that very much merits *his* At-
 tention, *viz.* of *what Service* it can be to the
 Protestant Cause, to take so much Pains as he has
 taken to *lessen* the Credit of *Primitive Antiquity*,
 and to put *Popery* in Possession of as *much* of it as
possibly he could, and *more*, perhaps, than *Popery*
 can in justice challenge. Our first Reformers,
 thought it to their Purpose, to throw the Weight
 of Antiquity on *their* Side so far as the Truth of
 History would allow. This Writer thinks it of
 no Consequence in the World, whether Anti-
 quity is *with* or *against* us ; for which his Pre-
 tence is, that “ Our Dispute with [the Papists]

“ is

“ is, not how *ancient*, but how *true* their Do-
 “ctrines and Practices are: And if they are not
 “ derived from *Christ* or his Apostles, nor found-
 “ ed in the Holy Scriptures, it is *wholly indif-*
 “ferent to us Protestants from *what* Age they
 “ drew their Birth, whether it was from the four
 “ *first* or the four *last* Centuries of the Church *.”
 His Premises are right, but his Conclusion is
 wrong. The Question is, *what* *Christ* or his
 Apostles taught, or (which is the same Thing)
what is the Scripture Doctrine? But it follows,
 not from hence, that it is a Matter *wholly in-*
different from *what* Age the *Popish* Doctrines
 drew their Birth, whether from the *earliest* or
 the *latest* Ages; because, the *Sense* and *Practice*
 of the Church in the Times *nearest* the Apostles
 form a *strong presumptive* Evidence to *determine*
 that Question. For Instance; *Christ*, when he in-
 stituted the Sacrament, said, *this is my Body*, and
this is my Blood. The Question between us and
 the Church of *Rome* is, *in what* *Sense* these
 Words were spoke; and if it could be made ap-
 pear that the *Popish* Sense of *Transubstantiation* was
 the *unanimous, current*, Doctrine of the *second*
 Century, it could scarce be doubted, but it was
 the Doctrine also of the *First*; and it would be
 more natural for *Unbelievers* to lay hold of this,
 as an Objection against the Gospel, than easy for
us to answer it. But the Case will not be the
 same, if it can be shewn, that this Doctrine drew
 its Birth from *later* Ages, as suppose four, five,
 or six hundred Years after *Christ*; because in
 every Age and every *part* of an Age, as you re-
 move downward from the original Source, the
Presumption grows *weaker*, till at last it comes to

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nothing. It is not Natural to think, that Christians *immediately* departed from the Precepts of *Christ* and his Apostles; but *Time* works great Changes; and in many Instances, Things so degenerate by Degrees from what they were at their first Institution, as hardly to preserve a *Resemblance*.

This reasoning will hold in all other Points of Difference between us and the Church of *Rome*, as well as in this one; and it was upon this Principle, that our Reformers thought it to their Purpose, to challenge as much of Antiquity to them- as they could find Authorities to justify from the Writings of the ancient Fathers; not meaning (as this Author surmises) to SUPPLY *Doctrines* from them, in which the Scriptures are thought DEFECTIVE; or to advance the *Primitive Traditions* to a PARITY with *Apostolic Precepts*, as ascribing the same GIFTS and POWERS to the *Holy Fathers*, and to the College of the Apostles *. No; if the Fathers had *Apostolic Gifts* and *Powers*, our Reformers considered them (as all Men of Sense consider them) to have been given in Confirmation of their *Doctrines*, not *as* theirs, but as the *Apostolic Doctrines*. They gave them no Authority, but the same Authority which this Writer himself † gives them (how consistently

* P. 47.

† P. 57. And Dr. *Waterland*, of whom he complains so heavily, had no other Notion of Antiquity than this. So far is he from advancing the *Primitive Traditions* to a PARITY with *Apostolick Precepts*, or putting Antiquity UPON A LEVEL with the Scripture, as this Writer charges him, P. 47, 41. that on the contrary he expressly says, that "Antiquity ought to attend as A HANDMAID to Scripture; to
" wait

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ly I say not) the Authority of *Witnesses* to the Doctrines received, and the Usages that prevailed in their Times, and from thence formed a *Presumption*, what Doctrines or Practices *were* or were *not* Apostolical. Whether this was making a *reasonable* Use of the Fathers, or this Writer is rather to be commended, who *disdains* all Aid to the Protestant Cause from *their* Testimony, let reasonable Men judge. But I am extremely apprehensive, that the Papists will think it for their Advantage to accept of the *high Rank* he has given them in *Ecclesiastical Antiquity*, without troubling themselves about *his Censures* of the Fathers, which indeed (so far at least as appears at present) are of very little Consideration.

“ wait upon her as HER MISTRESS, and to observe her.” *Importance* P. 361. And if you ask *how*, or to *what Purpose*; he tells you, P. 365. that it is as “ a proper *Means*, “ or *Help*, for the ASCERTAINING the true and full “ MEANING of sacred Writ, and for preserving THE DO- “ CTRINES of CHRIST;” upon which Hinge his whole Account of the Use of Primitive Antiquity turns. The Passages which our Author has cited from him in Support of his Charge, are nothing to the Purpose; and (what is *more*) if they had been quoted fairly with other Passages, with which they stand connected, would have been *seen to bear* directly against him: And, in truth, his whole Harangue about the Scriptures being *the Rule of Faith*, and his Charge upon the *present* Clergy as acting *inconsistently* with this Principle, and “ carrying the Credit of Ecclesiastical Antiquity, to an heighth that must needs alarm all serious “ Protestants, as tending to throw us again, into the Arms of “ the *Romish* Church” (which take up the twelve last Pages of his Book) is nothing else but one, thorough, *Impertinency* from the Beginning to the End of it. He either does not understand (what he writes about) the *Sense* of the *present* Clergy, or he willfully misrepresents it. To what *End* this is to serve, he best knows himself: But *certainly* whatever be the Faults of the *present* Set of Clergy, paying *too much* regard to *Ecclesiastical Antiquity*, is not *one* of them.

I have

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I have offered these Observations, not to take the Work out of the Hands of those learned Gentlemen, who are more immediately concerned in this Controversy ; but to obtain from the Publick, on their Behalf, and on the Behalf of the ancient Fathers of the Church, a *Suspension* of Judgment, till the Cause has had a fair Hearing on both Sides. And if our Author be disposed to make a proper Use of the Hints here given, they may, perhaps, help something towards directing him in the Choice of his Materials for his LARGER WORK, to which I now leave him, and shall dismiss the Reader (who may, perhaps, feel some *Apprehensions* in regard to *Cbristianity* from this Attempt) with these few general Reflections.

In the first place, there is a great Difference between the Miracles wrought by *Christ* and his Apostles, and the Miracles of later Ages ; as in point of *Importance*, so also in point of *Evidence*. The *First* were to be the *Foundation* of the Faith of *all* Ages, and therefore the Providence of God hath provided that they should be recorded to us, under the strongest Circumstances of Credibility, in the Writings of the Apostles. The *last*, however, for the Time, they might be useful or necessary, were not *themselves* the *Foundation* of the Faith, even of those Ages in which they were wrought, but *directed* them to *that* Foundation which had been laid by *Christ* and his Apostles. When the Apostles died, the whole System of Faith was *sealed* up as compleat and perfect ; and as no *other* Faith was afterwards to be admitted ; so, if no Miracles had afterwards been wrought, the Foundation would have been equally secure. *The old Miracles*

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Miracles (as Dr. Claget says) are sufficient for the *old Doctrines*; nor had the *new* ones any other Relation to the Truth of Christianity, than as they were a *visible Testimony* to those Ages of THAT POWER which subsisted in CHRIST and his APOSTLES; in Pursuance of whose *Promise*, and in Confirmation of whose *Doctrines*, they were wrought. Consider now the Disparity of Evidence. *Christ* confirmed all his Miracles, by that *one* great Miracle of all, his *rising from the Dead*. Of this *Fact* the Apostles were Eye-witnesses, and were to testify it throughout the World; and they did so, at the Peril of their Lives, which is the greatest Pledge that human Faith can give; GOD also confirming their Testimony, by the Signs and Wonders which he wrought by their Hands. But *who* laid down his Life in Testimony to any Miracle wrought in *after* Ages? No body. *Martyrs* there were in *After-ages*; but they were not *Martyrs* to *new Miracles*, but to the *Christian Faith*, as it stood upon the Miracles wrought by *Christ* and his Apostles (and especially, and above all, the great Miracle of *Christ's* * RESURRECTION) which they would have maintained if no *new* Miracle had ever been wrought. When Miracles are offered to establish a Religion *at first* which affects the Interests of Men in the tenderest Points, every Sentiment of Nature conspires to put us upon our Guards and to watch against Impostures with the utmost Caution; and this, no doubt, the first Believers did. But when, the Faith *once established* Miracles were to serve only as a *concurrent* Te-

* So St. *Austin* expressly; who concludes his Catalogue of Miracles thus: "Cui nisi HUIUS FIDEI attestantur ista miracula, in qua prædicatur Christus RESURREXISSE in Carne & in Cælum ascendisse cum carne? Nam et ipsi Martyres HUIUS FIDEI MARTYRES — fuerunt." *Civ. Dei* L. xxii. c. 9.

stimony,

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testimony; as there was not Reason for *equal* Caution, so you are not to wonder, if in the Writings of the Fathers you should find some Things of this sort, that may seem to have been taken up upon slender Authority. Say the very worst you *can* say (and *more*, I am persuaded, than will ever be * proved to be true) that there is not so much as *one* Miracle upon Record since the Days of the Apostles, that is sufficiently attested; what has *Christianity* to do with this? Nothing; for Christianity stands (as we have seen) not upon *new* Miracles, but upon the *old* ones. There is one Sense, in which Christianity may be affected by this Dispute; which is, as the *Credit* of the ancient Fathers may be affected by it. If you suppose them to have been only *hasty* and *credulous* in these Reports, it will come to but little; because they may yet *competently* serve for all the Uses for which we want them. And let it be remembered, that we want not their *Judgment* but their *Integrity*. We admit them, not as *authoritative Teachers*, but as *faithful Witnesses*; and this they may be, though in some Points *superstitious* and *too easy* of Belief; for if every History is to be re-

* How *likely* it is that the Author should give *Proof* of this may be judged by Mr. *Dodwell's* Account of the Miracles of the three first Centuries, in his second Dissertation upon *Irenaeus*, which I should have represented to the *English* Reader, if it had fallen within the Compass of my present Design; which is, not to enter into the *Merits* of the Cause, but to *remove Prejudices*. The Author is the Aggressor. He has laid the *Charge* against the Fathers; and upon HIM it lies to produce the *Evidence*. And whenever he will perform his Promise, and evince by *particular Facts* and *Testimonies* that this is an Account of MERE FICTIONS only; I make no doubt but his *Facts* and *Testimonies* will have due Regard paid to them.

jected

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jected as to the *main Body* and *Substance* of it, which reports *some* Facts of *doubtful* Authority, I know not what History can stand. It is not to be doubted, but that the superstitious Reverence paid to the holy Martyrs in the fourth and fifth Centuries, gave Rise to a Variety of Superstitions, about the *Virtue* of their *Bones* and *Reliques*. And are not such kind of Superstitions common in all Ages? Do not all Histories abound with the Superstitions of the Times in which they were written, which yet, for the *principal* Matters they contain, are not the worse thought of? — But if it could be proved, that the Fathers were IMPOSTORS and FORGERS of LIES, the Consequences may go a great way; and when the Author has *made good* this Charge, it may be necessary to consider them. In the mean time as he is not *constant* in this Point, but *varies* his Charge as the Humour varies; the Reader may take Heart, and (under *very comfortable* Hopes, that Christianity may, at last, maintain its Ground) sit down and hear, what this learned Gentleman has farther to say; who, without doubt, is exceedingly well disposed to *Christianity*, and the *Protestant Religion*; but (like some other great Authors of late) happens to be a little mistaken in his *Method* of serving them.

F I N I S.

ERRATA.

Pag. 14. l. 11. for *thing* r. *things*.

Pag. 20. l. 19. for *rather* r. *either*.

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